

User Satisfaction with AskColorado Continues

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Most users of AskColorado, the statewide 24/7 free virtual reference service, continue to report being satisfied with the service, according to a user satisfaction survey conducted by the Library Research Service (LRS).

In the fall of 2008, 1,335 AskColorado users completed a pop-up survey after their virtual reference transaction. The survey asked users how helpful they found the virtual librarian, how satisfied they were with the answer to their question, and how likely they were to use AskColorado again.

The results indicate users are pleased with the service. Nearly three out of four users (74%) said the virtual librarian they worked with was extremely helpful or helpful, while 72 percent indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the answer to their question. Most respondents (83%) said they were very likely or likely to use AskColorado again (see Chart 1). In addition, comments left by users often reflected their satisfaction. Many said they were impressed with the service and grateful for the help they received.

"The librarian I was working with was very helpful even though my subject was broad, and she found exactly what I was looking for. This site is wonderful. Thank you."

Virtual Reference: Colorado and the Nation

AskColorado, which marked its fifth full year of service in September 2008, has fielded over a quarter of a million sessions in English and Spanish since its inception. The service is staffed by librarians from 45 libraries throughout the state and 75 libraries in Colorado support AskColorado by providing monetary contributions and/or staffing. Thanks in large part to this service, 53% of public libraries in Colorado offer chat or instant-message reference service, compared with 22% of public libraries nationwide.¹

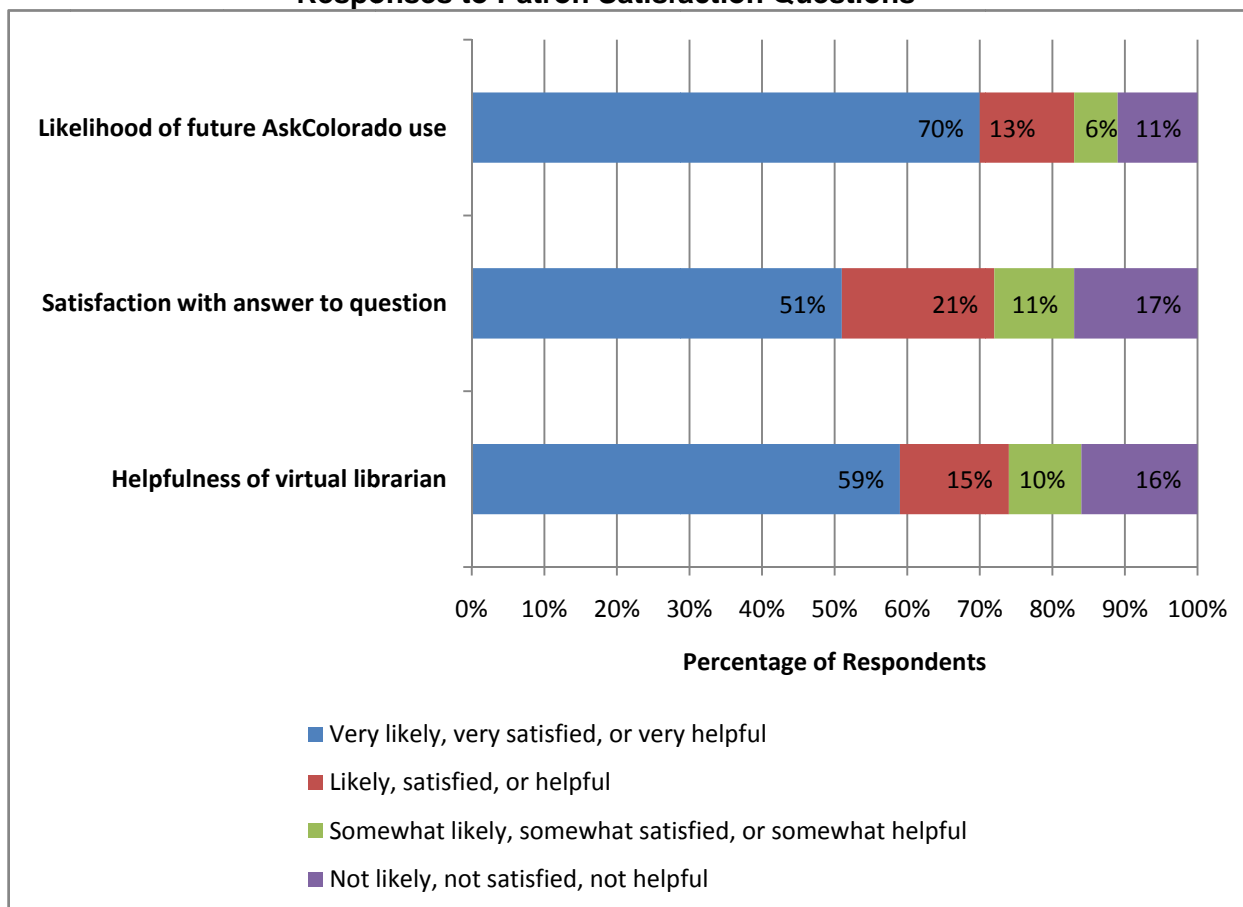


Usage Trends

AskColorado fielded 39,870 sessions in 2008, which is lower than 2007's total of 61,670. The reason for this decrease is due to the discontinuation of one "queue" that in 2007 generated 14,425 sessions. That queue, known as CoGov, was a pilot project between AskColorado and the web providers for the State of Colorado website. The pilot project was discontinued Jan. 1, 2008. Decreased traffic from the CoGov queue, in addition to technical logistics related to the discontinuation, resulted in lower total numbers for 2008. Although the total number of sessions was down, use by Spanish speakers grew. The number of sessions fielded in Spanish increased during 2008, from 329 in 2007 (an average of about one sessions per day) to 591 in 2008 (an average of almost two sessions per day).



Chart 1
2008 AskColorado User Survey
Responses to Patron Satisfaction Questions



User satisfaction with the service appears to be on the rise. In 2008, respondents reported the highest levels of satisfaction for all three satisfaction questions in the four years the survey has been administered. More respondents reported being “very satisfied” with the answer to their question than in previous years (from 43% in 2005 to 51% in 2008) and the percentage of respondents who indicate future use is “very likely” has increased each year the survey asked the question, from 61 percent in 2005 to 70 percent in 2008.

“The librarian was not only helpful, but very friendly as well. I could tell that she was doing everything she could to help me. Thanks!”

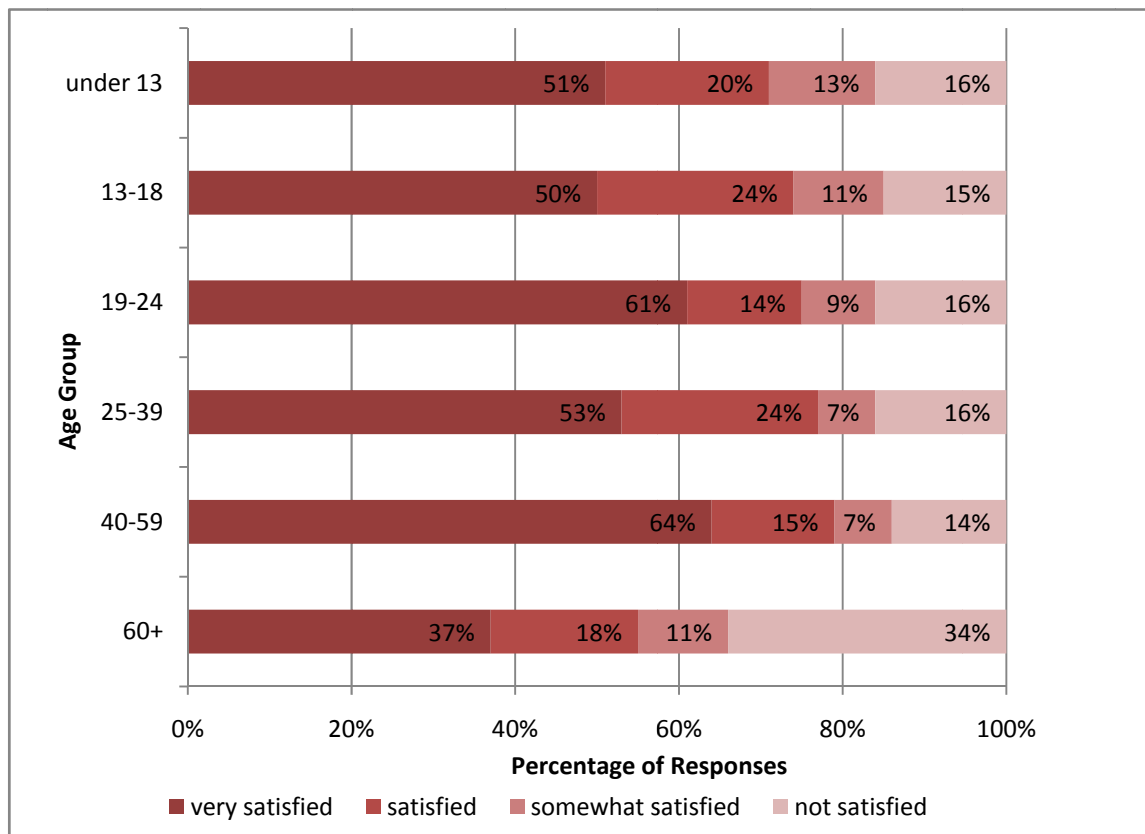
Generational Divide

When satisfaction levels were compared to respondents’ age, an interesting discrepancy emerged. Respondents ages 60 and older were less likely to rate the service highly in terms of helpfulness and satisfaction. While more than half (53%) of respondents from this age group were satisfied or very satisfied with the answer to their question, one in three said they were not satisfied with the answer to their question – twice the rate of any other age group (see Chart 2). This may reflect a generational difference in respondents’ familiarity



and comfort with instant messaging and virtual reference, among other factors. Although only 5% of survey respondents said they were 60 years or older, this generational divide may merit attention in the future.

Chart 2
Respondent Satisfaction with Answer to Their Question by Age Group



AskColorado and Schoolwork

AskColorado is used by students of all ages. Three out of five respondents (60%) identified themselves as current students; of those, nearly half (45%) are middle school students, although high school and college students are also well represented. (See Chart 3.)

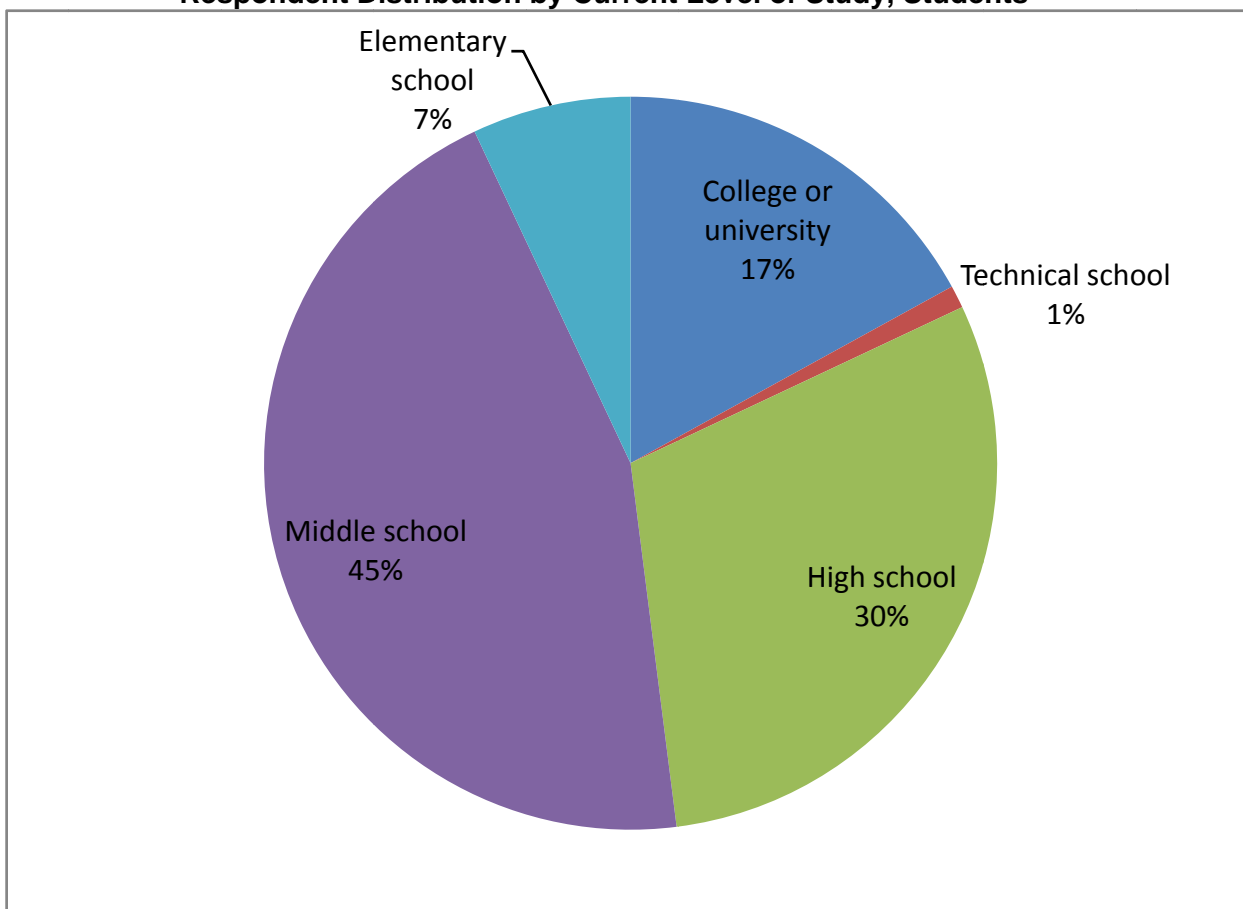
"I got all my homework done on one trip to this site. I will be recommending this site to all my friends and family."

Outcomes

In an effort to determine how and why people are using AskColorado, respondents were asked what they had achieved by using the service. More than half of student respondents (51%) did research for homework or a school project, while two out of five (40%) obtained a specific fact or document. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that AskColorado is a valuable resource for students and plays an important role in supporting education in the state.



Chart 3
Respondent Distribution by Current Level of Study, Students



Conclusion

As the virtual reference model matures, AskColorado continues to improve its services with user satisfaction ratings at record highs in 2008. Use of the service by students at all levels, as well as the outcomes reported by all respondents, indicate that users rely on AskColorado for assistance with schoolwork as well as for answers to traditional reference questions. The results of this survey suggest that AskColorado is providing a valuable resource for Coloradans by offering one-on-one service for patrons 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"Thanks for the help, it saved a lot of time searching meaningless websites."

¹ Lietzau, Z. (2009). *U.S. Public Libraries and the Use of Web Technologies*. Manuscript in preparation

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